New Fiction

Continued from preceding page.

true romance, and he is, indeed, retelling the old story in ultra modern terminology. He has worked over his material to extraordinarily good results. His Odysseus, Shoe-Bar" or "Buck" Stratton, is a returned soldier who has suffered much and seen much — *polutropon, os mala polla,* &c.—not only in the war but afterward. In place of the naughty adventures of his greater prototype he has suffered a year's eclipse from amnesia; modern science is ready to help the novelist with such finely suggestive terms as that. When he recovers his identity he finds that his ranch in the cow country is unaccountably in the possession of a beautiful and apparently innocent young lady who has inherited it from her father, a lawyer, who was rather a bad lot. But Stratton also finds that there is a mystery at large on the ranch as well as the interloping lady. It won't do to give it away, but it was a good enough mystery to encourage him in his determination to find out all about it. So he hires himself out as a cowboy on his own ranch to indulge in watchful waiting and find out what's going on.

From that point on the tale runs quite true to form. Merton of the Movies could reconstruct the whole plot without prompting from this introduction. The villain, the foreman, is a very heavy villain with numerous accessories, including a motor car. Of course, Stratton and Mary have to fall in love, but, by the way, it is an unusually pleasant and wholesome love story, much more real than most such, and excellently worked in as a true part of the plot. And of course, it all ends as it should. But Mr. Ames lifts it out of the commonplace with entire success.

Contrary to the belief of the average magazine editor, it seems probable that the theme of the returned soldier is far from being unpopular or at all overworked. It is capable of manifold variety, tragic, comic, melodramatic, romantic, even sociologically inquisitive, as, for example, in two other noteworthy books of recent issue, Miss Jordan's "Blue Circle" and Mr. Camp's "Hidden Road." It is a perfectly good theme if the writer knows enough to handle it as well as any of these three do.

I WALKED IN ARDEN. By Jack Crawford. Alfred A. Knopf.

THE first few chapters of this book promise well. We think we are to have a picture of Main Street in a small Middle West manufacturing town seen through the eyes of a New York American who has spent most of his life in England and is at the mature age of 23 when the young male animal is inclined to think he knows it all. The combination of circumstances is an excellent one for modern fiction.

But, alas! the contrasts are all on the surface, with few exceptions, and what we do get is a few years from the life of a very ordinary sort of man and the story of his short but happy marriage. However, this of itself would prove a task worthy of a writer's best effort. For after all, the ordinary mortals like Ted Jevons are the great majority.

It has not been altogether badly done. But the book bears all the earmarks of the novice at writing. There is promise in it. For in spite of his desire to tell all he knows, to show how many different parts of the earth he has been to and how many emotions he has suffered, the main fault of the beginner, there is an engaging frankness about the revelation of adolescent youth. Only a very young man, or a man who had not read much modern fiction and has never written before, could have been as naive in what he tells and how he tells it as Mr. Crawford is in this book. He learns that photography of petty detail may be truth but is not always art. If he learns what daily incidents are worth recording and what are merely boring, his later books may be worth watching.

The first third of this book is by far the most interesting. There are certain petty incidents and certain fundamental aspects of life in this Main Street which would not bother a girl from St. Paul but which will bring a smile and a reminiscent shudder to any Eastern American, particularly any with a background of European experience.

The story? Oh, yes—but there is so little to that. Ted Jevons is sent back to America by his father in London to take charge of the Deep Harbor chemical works. He marries a girl from Deep Harbor's best set, who has nothing provincial about her. They go back to England, live there happily, and have a little daughter. Then the young wife sickens, is taken to California, but too late. Death severs the happy bond.

The plan and scope of this book has so much to recommend it that it seems hardly fair to harp on the lack of craftsmanship, the result of which brings boredom at times. But craft can be learned. If Mr. Crawford will study the chief factors of style, emphasis and selection, the good things one can say about this his first book may be repeated about the later ones without the leavening of unfavorable criticism.

TARRANT OF TIN SPOUT. By Henry Oyen. George H. Doran Company.

IT is proverbial that oil and water do not mix well, but Mr. Oyen demonstrates that oil and a love story make a pretty good emulsion. There is nothing watery about the romance of this tale; rather it is "red blooded" fiction—not too red, but fairly brilliant in its coloring matter. It is, moreover, relieved by a certain broad, vigorous humor, a little boisterous, but sound and pleasant enough. Looked at from another point of view it is an excellent picture of the life of a Texas oil boom town. One expects exuberance and is not disappointed, but there is nothing absurd or too "het up" about it.

Spence Tarrant makes his first appearance at the railway station wearing a cattle man's sombrero, so we know at once that he is not merely an oil man. He proves it by doing the necessary introductory stunt of riding a bucking pinto pony, while the freshly arrived, beautiful young woman from the effete city looks on in mixed awe and admiration. Spence is a quick worker and the trouble begins at once. Marjorie plays up very nicely as leading lady, the villain's entry is announced and the game is on.

The astute reader may have guessed that a wicked multi-millionaire syndicate is going to make trouble for Tarrant and tangle things up generally. It all comes off, according to schedule, including some good fighting, much intrigue and a generally exciting time for all hands. It is not surprising to find that Marjorie comes 'round to Spence's side of the game and is among those present at the triumphant finish, with the preliminary caption "And then they clinched," but with the oil boom itself as the real "curtain." It is a well mixed combination, considerably more alive than most such attempts to entwine business and old fashioned romance.

ROGUES OF THE NORTH. By Albert M. Treynor. Chelsea House.

THERE is an attractive geographical novelty in the location of this tale, which is staged in the neighborhood of the Behring Straits, more or less in the "beyond," partly afloat, in and out of the very cold water and partly upon a mysterious island. Most of the characters, including the hero and deputy, or near-heroine, are semi-aquatic and fortunately well at home in the ocean. There is also something attractive in the use of a "lost" colony of seals in place of the ordinary form of treasure for which the adventurers go hunting. Of course it is not virgin territory for the romancer, and seals have functioned as appurtenances to fiction before now, but it is a region by no means overcrowded. Indeed it has only been occasionally invaded by the vagrant hero of romance, dragging along the needed ladies and villains to make up the party. And Mr. Treynor treats it very acceptably. The novel as a mystery story is above the average.

Besides that, Mr. Treynor has a fine feeling for the sea, for ships and the mystery of the great fog swept spaces of the edge of the arctic. His description is good and his seal island holds a well made puzzle in its "mystery"—a puzzle to which we shall not give the answer. The machinery of it involves the finding by an exploring professor, old Webster, of the log of a long lost ship giving details as to this colony of seals, and also recounting the mysterious disappearance of boats that went exploring there, starting with a crew and returning empty to the ship of their own accord. No wonder the Professor wanted to investigate. He had to have the hero along, because, like most wandering professors in fiction he had a daughter. Later on a duplicate hero and heroine turn up and there is a sort of change partners game and a nice mix up of cross purposes, misunderstandings and no end of trouble before it is all straightened out.

Pretty early in the game Forester, the hero, and Elise, the Professor's daughter tumble into the sea together, when a mysterious stranger turns up to shoot their skipper. Forester wasn't much of a swimmer, and Elsie couldn't swim at all, but they did very well none the less, and he keeps her afloat until help comes in the unexpected form of the second lady, who is something of a mermaid: She dives from her own ship and gathers them in. Of course ultimately he had to marry her, and Elise drops into the discard. And there's something refreshing about that, too. Although they get pretty wet, the whole thing is plausible enough, much more believable than many tales of adventure. The actors themselves have much reality—enough to make one like them, and to lead one to hope that Mr. Treynor will be moved to do it again. There is a fresh, unspoiled quality about his work that it is a pleasure to welcome.

THE ODDS, AND OTHER STORIES. By Ethel M. Dell. G. P. Putnam's Sons.

MISS ETHEL M. DELL is in a fair way to add a new term to the English language, just as some years ago Marie Corelli unsuspectingly created the now familiar adjective Corellian, and as, more recently, most readers in America became familiar with the impressive compound—haroldbellwriting. The phrase "Delilsh" has already gained a place in gossip concerning current reading matter. It needs no explanation, any more than Miss Dell needs any introduction to the several hundred thousand public who devour her stories in this country. She is fully entitled to the publisher's characterization of the "novelist who never had a failure!" This is number fifteen in the series of American issues of her tales.

This volume is made up of seven stories, each complete in itself, but the first two combined amounting to a full fledged novelette of some length. The first is an Australian yarn, dealing with the love adventure of a "new chum" and containing outlaws, ranchers, man hunters, a nice little green snake and all the other necessary ingredients.

It may be that the secret of her phenomenal success is that she can always be counted on to make her ladies and gentlemen and villains and accessory people do just exactly what the experienced novel reader wants them to do. Not that there is anything clumsy about it; indeed, it's always very nicely engineered, with diversity enough to enable one to tell one story from the others, but you may always be sure that it will end something as the last story in this collection does:

"She leaned nearer. Her hands slipped upwards, clasping his neck. . . .

"He did not speak in answer. It seemed as if he could not. That which lay between them was indeed beyond words. Only in the silence he took her again into his arms and kissed her on the lips."

It isn't necessary to add any comment, unless we may remark: Selah! This volume is fully up to the specifications, and in spite of the alleged prejudice against collections of short stories it is likely to keep the retail book dealers busy.

THE STRETTON STREET AFFAIR. By William Le Queux. The Macaulay Company.

A YOUNG London doctor, shortly returned from the war, starts out one night from his lodgings to call on a relative. On his way, passing through Stretton Street, he is hailed by a servant who is apparently much perturbed. Will the young man come at once, as his master has great need of him. The doctor goes. The master is not so much excited as the servant. He gives the doctor a drink and a cigar. Presently the master of the luxurious house leaves the room. There is commotion and a cry. The doctor is led to a nearby room. There, apparently dead, is a beautiful young woman. My niece, explains the householder; she has died of heart disease; please sign a death certificate to that effect and I will give you five thousand pounds.

We purposely neglected to say that just before leaving home the young doctor was apprised that all his small fortune, which he had put in Royal British Shoestrings Preferred or something of that nature, has been blown into the kingdom come of bad investments. He is hard up; five thousand pounds looms large; and there is no evidence that the beautiful girl did not die of heart disease. Besides, between the drink and the cigar and some subtle influence that he cannot determine exactly, his brain is in a whirl, his moral fiber weakened. He signs the certificate. Then, as the novelists have said for a couple of centuries, all is blank. He wakes up several weeks later in a sanitarium in France. The nurses and physicians can only tell him that he was picked up, evidently insane, in a nearby town. Yes, yes, calm your impatience; the five thousand pounds are still in his pocket—this is a work of fiction.

The doctor, tortured by a conscience which tells him that he has been the hired accessory to a great crime, starts back over the trail to solve the Stretton Street mystery, to hunt down the fellow who hired him and to avenge the supposed murder of the beautiful girl.

But this is as far along the journey as the present guide goes. All persons wishing to accompany the remorseful doctor to the end of the trail will kindly shift to the experienced supervision of Mr. Le Queux. The slight expense of the trip covers sinister Italian scientists, rare poisons hitherto unknown to the test tubes and many startling denouements. All aboard!

THE BLUE CIRCLE. By Elizabeth Jordan. Century Company.

MISS Jordan is fond of the masquerade as a frame work for her mystery stories. In "The Girl in the Mirror" it was a light handed, almost farce comedy business. This time it is a tragic mask that she gives her hero, and the tragedy of it all is movingly real. It may possibly jar some readers who seek no more than mild entertainment in such stories to find themselves face to face with at least the memory of only too solid and palpable horrors, but it is soundly conceived and makes a much better story of the whole than any of her previous offerings. It is also a wholesome thing to be reminded, even a little roughly, that there has been a war, and that the tragedies of that war were not figments of the imagination. Some of the incidents of the submarine campaigning were so hideous that we are in danger of thinking them just bad dreams. It is well to be reminded, even if it takes fiction to jog our elbow into attention, that these things really happened. They have a place in fiction—"lest we forget."

But that background is not at all over worked in this tale. It is no more than part of the explosion that sets the plot aboiling. The hero, Renshaw (but of course, as it's a masquerade that is but part of his

Continued on following page.

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